

August 28, 2015

**To:** All Health Care Practitioners

**Subject:** Hepatitis B vaccine- Enhancement of the Publicly Funded Immunization Program to include MSM group (men who have sex with men)

Dear Colleagues:

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) would like to inform you that the publicly funded immunization program has been expanded to include the hepatitis B vaccine for men who have sex with men (MSM). As of September 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, RECOMBIVAX HB® (Adult presentation) will be made available free of charge to all MSM, in New Brunswick.

In 2014, there has been an increase in the number of cases of acute hepatitis B virus (HBV) infections reported to Public Health in New Brunswick. The largest increase of cases was reported in the Moncton area, mainly in the MSM population.

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) transmission occurs primarily among unvaccinated persons with behavioral risks (e.g. MSM). Hepatitis B vaccination is the most effective measure to prevent infection and its consequences, including cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. We are asking that you review immunization status with your patients and offer vaccination to those who are eligible for publicly funded HBV vaccine.

It is important to note that MSM may describe themselves as gay, bisexual or heterosexual. Therefore, risk levels for sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI'S) may not be evident in all patients and more explicit questioning may be warranted. It is important that healthcare providers take the opportunity to offer testing to your patients for all STBBI's, as well as education and counseling on ways to reduce their exposure through changes in sexual behaviors and use of recommended prevention. More information on the eligibility criteria for Publicly Funded Vaccines and Biologics in New Brunswick is available in the *New Brunswick Immunization Program Guide*:

<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/en/CDC/HealthProfessionals/NBIPG-standard3-3-e.pdf>.

Once again on behalf of the team here in the OCMOH, I want to thank you for being a *partner in protection and control* of communicable disease in New Brunswick.

Sincerely,



Shelley Landsburg  
Director  
Communicable Disease Control Branch  
Department of Health